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STEAM

VA Strategies to Educate and Address Menopause

Newsletter



MyHealthVet to Enable And Negotiate
for Shared Decision Making

Miami VA
Healthcare System
★★★★★

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Caregiving and Stress

Many women across the US are unpaid long-term care to family members. Close to two-thirds of caregivers are women and tend to be the wives or daughters of those who need assistance. Unpaid caregivers do more than most people realized. They help they provide range from grocery shopping and cleaning their loved ones' house to dressing them and assistance using the toilet. Many of these women also help with the finances and make medical decisions. More than half of these caregivers will do all this while also working at full-time or part-time jobs. This can make life very stressful. More and more women are beginning to take the care giving role in raising their grandchildren as well. Caregiving can add a great amount of stress to our lives. It is important to know how to unwind and de-stress.

Health Risks:

Caregiving can take a toll on your health. You are often so busy taking care of a loved one that you neglect your own health. Research shows that women caregivers:

- Get colds and flu more easily
- Are more likely to have depression or anxiety
- Are at higher risk for heart disease

Caregiving can be a wonderful experience. Caring for a loved one can be rewarding and can deepen the relationship you have with them. However, caregiving is also physically and emotionally demanding. Many of those caring for families provide help are "on call" practically 24 hours a day and may have to provide assistance several times a day. This leaves little time to spend with spouses, children, and friends, or at work much less time to take care of themselves. Those who work may fear losing their jobs due to the amount of days and hours they must take off. This can all quickly become overwhelming and cause a caregiver to burn out.

When you do not care for your own physical and emotional health you may end up negatively affecting your overall health and your ability to care for your loved one which may put them at risk. Being stressed or overly tired can cause a person to make mistakes such as giving the wrong medication or forgetting to make an important doctor's appointment. Stress can cause mood swings that may lead to verbal explosions, or even unintentionally neglect or mistreat the person you are caring for. In the end, you may completely burn out physically and/or emotionally and leave you unable to give care at all.

Don't ignore these possible signs of burnout:

- Feeling moody, sad, or unusually anxious
- Crying more often than usual
- Trouble sleeping or getting out of bed in the morning
- Low energy
- Lacking interest in things you usually enjoy
- Feeling short of breathe or like there is a knot in your throat
- Frequent stomach cramps or headaches
- Chest pains
- Drinking too much alcohol (more than one drink a day)
- Eating too much or too little

Don't ignore these symptoms and get help. Talk to your PACT provider about your physical and emotional symptoms. Make sure they know that you are a caregiver. Seeing a therapist may help. Most importantly, don't ignore emergency symptoms such as severe chest pains, shortness of breath, nausea, sweating, or pain in the jaw because these are signs that you may be having a heart attack — call 911 immediately. If you feel like hurting yourself or are afraid you will hurt yourself, talk to a family member, friend, clergy member, or your doctor.

All information for this newsletter can be
found at:
www.womenshealth.gov

For more information on hormone therapies and menopause please visit our websites at:

www.menopause.varesearchfoundation.com

www.miami.va.gov/menopause

Taking care of yourself

There's good news! There are many ways you can prevent burnout. You may not be able to do all of them but making the effort will pay off.

- Ask for and accept help. You can't do it all yourself.
- Stay in touch with friends and family. Doing so can help you feel connected and may reduce stress. People close to you may also notice signs of stress and burnout.
- Exercise every week. It doesn't need to be 30 minutes. You can break it down to 10 minutes of exercise throughout the day. Exercise reduces stress and keeps you healthy.
- Establish a regular routine. Find a system and schedule that works for you and stick. Knowing what tasks need to get done makes sure there are few surprises.
- Look to faith-based groups for support and help. Most faith-based groups also have programs with people who are willing to help.
- Join a support group for caregivers in your situation (ex. Dementia support group). Sometimes you just need to talk to people who know what you are going through. The National Family Caregiver's Assoc. links caregivers in different cities and offers online support groups.
- If you can afford to, get help. It doesn't even have to be a professional caregiver. It can be a cleaning service or someone who delivers groceries, someone who can take a chore off your plate. Depending on your finances and where you live, you may qualify for free or low-cost services like transportation and respite care. Contact your local Area Agency on Aging to see what is available to you.
- Take time for yourself. Make sure you do something for yourself each day. Take a quick walk to clear your head or meet a friend for coffee. Try to find the time to do things you enjoy.
- Get enough rest and full nights sleep. Not getting enough sleep increases stress hormones in your body and can sap your mood, energy, and health. Talk to your PACT provider if sleep problems continue.
- Eat healthy, balanced diet. If you eat better, you will feel and function better.
- Take it one day at a time. Don't obsess about everything happening in your life. It doesn't solve anything.

VA Links

www.myhealth.va.gov

This is the link to the My HealtheVet page. There you can learn all the ways it can help you stay connected to your healthcare team, how to enroll, reorder medications, etc. Once enrolled in the My HealtheVet you can participate in our MEANS program.

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WOMEN VETERANS HEALTH CARE

*You served, you deserve
★ the best care anywhere.*



As of August 1st, the Miami VHAS has a new provider dedicated exclusively to women's health



Dr. Joslyn Wiley

Dr. Joslyn Wiley offers primary care services to women Veterans at our Women's Health clinic at the Bruce W. Carter Medical Center

For appointments, call 305-575-7000, extension 7001